

TRANSPORTATION SUMMIT

ISSUE: Communication, Consciousness Raising & Public Involvement

Comments from Planning Team at 9/29/03 Meeting

Communication

- There is a lack of public awareness on the transportation issues. How do we get this information to the public better? One issue may be “How do we get that information to the public more readily?”
- Important to make people believe that they will be heard in the process.
- This comes down to the marketing approach that transportation uses.
- When messaging, it is extremely important to understand your audience, as well as the language. Absolutely have to be credible.
- Have to be careful that the message we think we are sending is what people are interpreting.
- We need to frame the problem and the issue.
- Coalitions are necessary to transmit transportation messages.
- Growing dominance of news media as compared to the traditional forms of communication.
- Operation types of improvement are becoming more important to the transportation community. Good communication is essential.
- As we go into intelligent vehicles, getting accurate information is essential.
- I heard that cost effective and effective communication is quite possible and it doesn't have to be really expensive, often is but doesn't have to be.
- Advocacy e-mail is very effective to use. It was fast. Message must be believable. Appears to be a great way to communicate.
- May consider changing “what the public wants” to “what is the public willing to use?” We heard where the public wants one thing but only few actually use it.
- Good research, such as polling, is necessary to develop and communicate transportation messages.
- Transportation community needs to be flexible enough to use the most effective communication with the target audience.
- Essential to make sure all target audiences are heard from, for example, if you hold meetings after public transportation closes, we may not hear from this group of citizens.
- Communication depends on level and may vary, state-wide level vs. project level. Use whatever it takes at the project level. We can use brochures to hand out, door-to-door a few days before an open house, get the public looking at plans, get introduced to people, and see when they can have access and what involvement they would like to have.
- Focused on emergency communication across borders, up and down levels of government and across levels of government. Clearly there is a communication in place and partnerships are in place. May need to access how to use this same frame work for less immediate but no less important communication.
- In marketing, the volume of our voice (how loud that voice needs to be at a particular time) as stated by Roger, is important to consider. Right now we need to focus on the education piece. The earned media is the issue.

- We produce a ranking report of crashes in Oakland County, but do it in 3 ways; volume, severity, and number of crashes. Before sending out a general release, they talk to the reporters they work with and educate them on what they will be getting. An education to and with the public and media.
- Have to repeat the message. One time out there the message will be forgotten.
- Didn't talk about, but exists, how to handle media relations when they get it wrong? Damage control.
- If we don't have \$2-\$3M to spend on a campaign, we need alternate methods to get our message to the public.
- Last week talked about a state-wide information source for public transportation and can be applied to other modes as well.

Education

- One goal may be to have all Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Rural Task Forces (RTFs) in the State produce their version of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) document, "A Citizens' Guide to Transportation Planning in Southeast Michigan", identifying who to call, what the process is, and time frames.
- Educating the public at the project level is not the point of entry. In the process it is early entry that has to occur to be meaningful.
- The public doesn't understand the menu of choices for input that they have; i.e., the choices we can have on bridge projects and the aesthetic effects for the side walls, etc. Not sure they understand the type of input they can have.
- The link has to be made for public communication and education about the value of the transportation system in our State. Especially a State that relies on agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing.
- From planning today's workshop, we need to educate transportation professionals on how to do public involvement.
- It is difficult to get people interested in things until they know they are interested in it.

General Comments

- The decentralized TSC approach is working. Are there ways to enhance this?
- Tie into safety. In the communication, consciousness raising, & public involvement issue, traffic safety is most important.
- Need to make the distinction between advocacy and information.
- We need champions that can speak to the needs of transportation improvements and localize the issue.
- Impressed with the fact that we do a lot of things very well; especially in project development, identified things we can do better, but heard a lot of effort in reaching out to the public. May need to work on the bigger picture.

Planning

- Do we have any information regarding over time what part of projects were in long range plans compared to those that were not? The long range plan is what got done.
- We do have this information and that is an educational piece that needs to be out there.
- The metropolitan areas where projects are not done are not in the SLRP. MDOT has a 5 year plan with this list.

- What I didn't hear, but will include, is follow-up on improvement and need for technology to help citizens. Road or non-road users can help in our efforts.
- What we do is background and is often taken for granted. We need to try to take it to the next level and not have it taken for granted. A lot of people work hard to make this happen.

Survey Results

- Current survey statistics of the general public indicated about 4% have transportation as a top issue. Need to find out who that 4% is; and at a minimum, target them with the information and find out how to expand from there.
- Rob said if MRI shows 4% of the citizens believe highways is an important issue and 24% are concerned about improving jobs, how do we connect the two? Believe that transportation is greater than 4% but economic impact is very important.
- When looked at survey, it looked like people were guarding their wallets, economy, health care, etc. Improving education already exists but when talking about protecting environment and roads; those are two areas that deal with out-of-pocket expenses. This may be why it was ranked where it was. News of the day is about health care and economy.
- The public doesn't put much stock in improving roads and highways with a 4% survey result. If put that item on the list and said "provide safe bridges and fill pot holes", you would have seen higher percentages. You can get what you want out of a poll depending on the question you ask.
- Research is very important but be careful how you craft the questions and interpret the answers.